

Description

CASINO LOW BALL GAME AND METHOD OF DEALING CARDS THEREIN

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is based on Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/430,985, filed December 4, 2002.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to card games, specifically "low ball" poker games, and methods for dealing them, either physically or by electronic representations.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

[0003] Poker has been a popular card game for more than a century. Today, hundreds of card rooms and casinos provide poker rooms for players to play against other players. These are considered class two games by the gaming industry. (Class two games are games in which the players bet against each other.) At the start of each poker hand,

players have only a vague idea of how many bets it may cost to play the hand through to the end. Various games require from two to five betting intervals, with three to five raises usually allowed.

[0004] With just a five-dollar minimum bet, a single hand could cost forty to one hundred fifty dollars to see the hand through to the end. Even if a player wins the bet, their return for bets invested is highly uncertain.

[0005] The more bets a player places in the pot, the greater the mental stress becomes in making decisions to continue calling bets to the end of the hand. This pressure often causes players to lose their mental control. Their method of play and money management can completely disintegrate. A fun game suddenly becomes a disaster filled with stress.

[0006] For the foregoing reasons, only a small percentage of casino patrons ever enter the poker room. The majority of casino patrons are seeking relaxation and enjoyment for their gambling dollar.

[0007] Games that require just one bet per hand are much less stressful to play. Therefore, some players seek out games such as blackjack, craps or mini-baccarat. These are the most favorable games for the player, when played cor-

rectly. They minimize the up and down fluctuations of the player's chips. This, in turn, leads to more sound mental control.

[0008] Other players seek out the elusive large payments for small bets that slot machines appear to offer. However, their money usually dwindles away, unless they hit a lucrative payout or two. In the last decade a large variety of new games have appeared in the casino pit areas. Most of these new games are considered class three games by the gaming industry. (Class three games are games in which the players bet against the house.) A common feature seems to dominate most new games. Their inventors tend to cede overwhelming odds to the casinos, much to the detriment of the players. They seem to feel that this feature will cause their games to be more readily accepted by the casinos looking for quick profits.

[0009] Variations of class three poker games seem to be the most appealing to adventurous players. However, the most knowledgeable poker players avoid these games. They quickly realize that the lopsided rules favoring the casinos leave them virtually no chance to win. A large percentage of these poker games require the dealer to have a reasonably good starting hand to "qualify" playing against

the players' hands. In most instances, this qualifying rule will encompass close to half of all hands received.

[0010] Players are required to place their first bet after receiving their poker hand. Additional bets are required, or they lose their first bet. It is at this point that the dealer's qualifying rule places the greatest pressure on the players. Slightly under 50% of the time, the value of a player's hand dictates folding their hand and giving up their bet. The sub-par value of their hand has no chance of winning additional bets, whether the dealer qualifies or not. When the dealer's hand does qualify, slightly over 50% of the time the player loses all bets.

[0011] If the player receives a hand better than the minimum hand the dealer requires to qualify, placing additional bets might be in order. However, risking additional bets still has more negatives than positives. Almost half the time, the player receives no payoff for the extra bets at risk, each time the dealer does not qualify. On the other hand, when the dealer does qualify, it becomes a virtual toss-up whether the dealer or the player will win. At best, this break even chance occurs 30% of the time. The player is clearly the underdog on all other occasions.

[0012] Overall, the rules tend to place the player in a no-win sit-

uation. A long shot straight flush or better is the players best hope to walk away a winner. The average chance of this happening is about 65,000 to one.

[0013] The unfavorable rules for the player seem to destine players to lose from the moment they place their first bet.

Some players realize that their best choice is to concede their losses and leave quickly. Others allow these types of table games to destroy their mental control and exhaust their chips. Facing one dilemma after another, they have no chance to relax and enjoy themselves. Any chance of having a good time quickly disappears. Worst of all, when a player loses mental control, the Automatic Teller Machines are always too close by.

[0014] The present invention is designed to help alleviate many of the distressing decisions players face in most of these recently created table games. It is based on the game of low ball poker. Years ago, the first low ball poker game was invented. "Low ball" means that the worst poker hand is the winner. The worst possible hand was 7-5-4-3-2, disallowing any ace high, pairs, three or four of a kind, straights and flushes.

[0015] When California low ball became the dominant low ball game, a 5-4-3-2-A was deemed the lowest possible

hand, with an ace or joker being counted as one. Since this hand was a five high straight, it was decided that all straights and flushes would be of no consequence in declaring the lowest hand. This concept generally became accepted for most low ball games, including high-low split games, seven-card stud, hold-em, and Omaha poker. This created more exciting possibilities for these games, thereby developing more betting action.

[0016] The present inventors have conceived an original idea to create even more exciting possibilities in the low ball games of the present invention, by declaring pairs and three or four of a kind to be of no consequence in determining the best low hand. The instant invention uses this modified low hand poker count in a class three game.

[0017] The prior art low ball games create nine basic possibilities for low hands: King low, Queen low, Jack low, ten low, nine low, eight low, seven low, six low, and five low. With pairs (and three or four of a kind) of no consequence, four additional possibilities are created for low hands: four low, trey (or three) low, deuce (or two) low, and Ace (or one) low (four aces or three aces and a joker). This establishes thirteen basic low hands in total.

[0018] This game is further modified (in its preferred embodi-

ments) to deal four-card poker hands instead of the standard five-card poker hands. This produces more frequent winnings for the players, when they place from five to nine separate bets on low hands of nine or less. All such bets must be in equal amounts, except (in the first preferred embodiment) for the one low bet, which will be fifty cents only.

[0019] The primary purpose of this game is to provide the players with a chance to relax and enjoy themselves. To this end, the game provides a single betting interval at the start of each hand. No additional betting or other decisions are required of the players to complete the hand. The game also provides the players a chance to win large payouts for relatively small bets.

[0020] There have been numerous prior inventions of casino and card games, but none that are equivalent to the present invention.

[0021] U.S. Patent No. 3,796,433, issued on March 12, 1974, to Walter C. Fraley, James T. Hendrix and Charles A. Bell, discloses an electronic gaming device simulating the game of blackjack.

[0022] U.S. Patent No. 5,632,485, issued on May 27, 1997, to Bill W. Woodland and Linda M. Woodland, discloses a card

game with side bet options, which may be played either on a game board or on an electronic gaming device. Wagers are placed after an initial display of two cards. The instant invention is distinguishable, in that all four cards are displayed at one time.

[0023] U.S. Patent No. 5,810,663, issued on September 22, 1998, to Joseph V. Bochichio and Robert S. Pinchbeck, discloses a method of playing a high/low card game, in which three cards are dealt to each player and four cards to the dealer. Only low hands of six low or less have any value as a low hand. Pairs, three of a kind, and three-card straights and flushes do not count as low hands. The instant invention is distinguishable, in that it is strictly a low ball game, and it includes an array on nine squares.

[0024] U.S. Patent No. 5,911,419, issued on June 15, 1999, to Thomas A. Delaney and Bennett M. Wilgard, discloses a method and apparatus for playing bettors choice draw poker, including rectangular playing areas on a table. The instant invention is distinguishable, in that the hands are ranked differently, and it uses a different betting system.

[0025] U.S. Patent No. 5,928,081, issued on July 27, 1999, to Joseph V. Bochichio and Robert S. Pinchbeck, discloses a high/low card game, in which there are several rounds of

dealing and betting. The instant invention is distinguishable, in that it includes only one round of dealing and betting.

[0026] U.S. Patent No. 6,017,033, issued on January 25, 2000, to Claude Keller, discloses a method of playing a casino game, which rewards a player for how quickly he can "lose". The instant invention is distinguishable, in that it does not include the use of a timer.

[0027] U.S. Patent No. 6,210,279, issued on April 3, 2001, to Peter D. Dickinson, discloses a gaming machine and method using a touch screen.

[0028] U.S. Patent No. 6,283,474, issued on September 4, 2001, to David Guy de Keller, discloses a method for playing a casino game, with rectangular betting areas on a table.

[0029] U.S. Patent No. 6,322,075, issued on November 27, 2001, to Ann DeFranco, discloses a blackjack-type card game, where each player is dealt a four-card array.

[0030] U.S. Patent No. 6,435,505, issued on August 20, 2002, to Arthur Hoffman, discloses a method for playing a game of chance, with indicia including numbers on a playing board, which indicia are distinguishable from the indicia in the instant invention.

[0031] U.S. Patent No. 6,485,020, issued on November 26, 2002,

to John Broadnax, discloses a casino card game, with a game board with indicia including numbers. Again, the indicia are readily distinguishable from the indicia in the instant invention.

[0032] U.S. Patent No. 6,523,830, issued on February 25, 2003, to Tsuan Yuan, discloses a casino game, in which the aces may be valued at one or zero.

[0033] U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/195775, published on December 26, 2002, by Derek J. Webb and Roger M. Snow, discloses four card poker and associated games, including indicia on a table.

[0034] British Patent Application No. 2 239 811, published on July 17, 1991, by Denis Fluen, discloses a betting game, including a game board with numbered play zones, which is played with dice, rather than cards as in the instant invention.

[0035] None of the above inventions and patents, taken either singly or in combination, is seen to describe the instant invention as claimed.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0036] The present invention is a modified form of low ball poker, in which the generally accepted method of determining the ranking of various low hand values is altered,

to create thirteen basic low hands instead of nine. The player is offered the option of placing from five to nine independent bets on each of the nine lowest possible hands from nine low to one low.

[0037] Each player receives a four-card hand from a 53-card deck of 52 standard cards plus a joker. The highest-ranking card in these four cards will determine the basic value of each player's low hand. The hand can range from a king low (consisting of four kings, the highest and therefore the worst hand) to a one low (consisting of four aces or three aces and the joker, the lowest and therefore the best hand). The joker is always considered an ace.

[0038] It is possible to win one independent bet or all independent bets, depending on the highest card held by the player. Payouts range from four to one on the nine low to 2,150 to one on the two low. Aggregate payouts are as high as 2,750 to one for a two low, plus \$10,000 for a special fifty-cent bet on the one low (the latter being a payoff of 20,000 to one). Other aggregate payouts range from eleven to one for the eight low to 600 to one for the three low.

[0039] All players have an individual betting area, as will be explained below. There is no stress from playing against

other players or the dealer. Every players hand wins or loses on its own merits.

[0040] In the first preferred embodiment, each player is provided a separate betting square on which to place his or her independent bets. In the second preferred embodiment, an electronic gaming machine is used, with representations of cards and betting rectangles displayed on a screen, with similar payouts, except for a progressive jackpot for the one low.

[0041] For players who have a limited time to play, this game provides one of their very best chances to leave with a huge, meaningful win. It also creates a unique camaraderie among the players. If one player wins the top payout, other players have a chance to win one thousand dollars or more, just for being involved in the hand. This applies even if they loose on their own hand, as will be explained below.

[0042] This simple game strives to provide players with more of what they are looking for: An easy game to understand, designed to help them avoid the stressful pitfalls built into the majority of other new games. Lucrative payouts are reasonably possible.

[0043] Players have the right to relax and enjoy this fun and ex-

citement as it permeates the playing table. After all, it is their money that makes possible the survival of all casinos. With a certain amount of luck, should not all players have a chance to occasionally walk away a winner?

[0044] All winning hands receive multiple payouts. These range from four for one up to 30,000 for one. Payouts are structured somewhat similarly to slot machine payouts. These payouts should supply extra fun and excitement in exchange for the money players place at risk.

[0045] The joy of playing the instant invention should exceed that of the slot machines. It is not unusual to place fifteen or twenty bets on a slot machine and receive no action at all in return. Sitting all alone at a slot machine can become a dull and boring activity. This is in vivid contrast to the camaraderie and congeniality existing at most live table games. This is especially true when players do not play against the dealer or each other. In further contrast to the slot machines, players should receive multiple action every four or five bets at this table game. Players also have a chance to win big, if another player wins the top payout. Any losing hand can share in that payout. Why would players not be cheering each other on?

[0046] Payouts in the instant invention range from 94% to 96% on

the average bets placed at risk. These percentages are consistent for all hands. Payouts on slot machines at major casinos throughout the United States generally range from 90% to 96%. The payouts are very erratic, as a large bulk of payout percentages go into large jackpot payouts. Most slot players fare poorly, unless they hit some of the larger payouts.

[0047] The table game of the first preferred embodiment provides each player a betting area with nine separate squares, numbered one through nine. Five equal bets must be placed on squares number nine, eight, seven, six and five. Placing equal bets on squares number four, three or two is optional, as is placing a fifty-cent bet on square number one. Thus, a minimum of five bets is required, and a maximum of nine bets is allowed. It is possible to win any bet or all bets. A bet is won when the highest-ranking card in the four-card hand does not exceed the number on which the bet is placed. A player's hand must contain a ten, Jack, Queen or King to lose all bets.

[0048] The second preferred embodiment applies the same principles to an electronic gaming device. All bets must be equal bets of one coin, chip or token each. There is a progressive jackpot for the one low bet. The jackpot is accu-

culated from 90% to 95% of the total proceeds received from the bets placed on the hand of one low. Two low through nine low hands should occur with the same frequency and the same payout percentages as in the first embodiment. A truly random four-card deal, using a 53-card deck containing a joker in the electronic gaming device, will assure the same frequency for all possible hands as in the first embodiment. The result will be an average and very consistent 95% return in payouts. Players should on the average have some winning action every four or five plays. Accordingly, it is a principal object of the invention to enhance the game of low ball poker by altering the generally accepted method of determining the ranking of various low hand values.

[0049] It is another object of the invention to provide the players a chance to relax and enjoy themselves.

[0050] It is a further object of the invention to provide the players a chance to win large payouts for relatively small bets.

[0051] Still another object of the invention is to provide a game with simple rules that will not perplex the players or dealers.

[0052] It is an object of the invention to provide improved elements and arrangements thereof in an apparatus for the

purposes described which is inexpensive, dependable and fully effective in accomplishing its intended purposes.

[0053] These and other objects of the present invention will become readily apparent upon further review of the following specification and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0054] FIG. 1 is a top plan view of the betting area for a player in the first preferred embodiment of the invention.

[0055] FIG. 2 is a front elevational view of the electronic gaming machine in the second preferred embodiment of the invention.

[0056] FIG. 3 is a table showing projected hold on 200 hands with a bet of one dollar (\$1.00) on each of squares 2 through 9 and a bet of fifty cents (\$0.50) on square 1.

[0057] Similar reference characters denote corresponding features consistently throughout the attached drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0058] The first preferred embodiment of the present invention is a modified low ball poker game, with a single joker added to a standard deck of 52 cards. In the standard deck the cards have four suits (spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs) and thirteen ranks (Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,

Jack, Queen, and King) with one card of each suit in each rank. Players hands consist of four cards, rather than the standard five card poker hands. The dealer receives no hand. The rank of a hand is determined by the card of the highest rank in the hand (with Ace the lowest rank, and King the highest rank, and the joker counting as an Ace). E.g., if a seven is the highest card in a players hand, the hand is "seven low". Pairs (two cards of the same rank), three or four of a kind (three or four cards of the same rank), straights (cards in sequential rank) and flushes (cards of the same suit) are ignored in determining rank. This modification of the prior art low ball game (in which only straights and flushes are ignored in ranking hands, but not pairs, or three or four of a kind) increases the number of possible basic low ball hands from nine (5 low, 6 low, 7 low, 8 low, 9 low, 10 low, Jack low, Queen low, and King low) to thirteen by the additional possible basic low ball hands of 4 low, 3 low, 2 low, and 1 low (four aces or three aces and the joker).

[0059] In the first preferred embodiment, the game is played on a casino table similar to a blackjack table, with a dealers area and six designated betting areas to accommodate one to six players. Each players betting area will include

one large square 10 divided into nine smaller squares 12, numbered 1 through 9, representing 1 low through 9 low, as depicted in FIG. 1. (Each square represents a hand of the same number.) Each square has a numeral 14 in large type in its center, and upper indicia 16 and lower indicia 18 in smaller type. Each large square may be printed on a piece of paper or other movable material, or painted, engraved or otherwise permanently affixed to the surface of the table. Each player must place a minimum of five equal bets in square 5 through square 9. (The bets may be made by placing chips, tokens or actual money on the squares.) Bets in the same equal amount on any one, two, or all three of squares 2, 3 and 4 are optional. In addition, each player has the option of placing a fifty-cent bet on square 1. (A different fixed amount may be substituted by the house for square 1.) All bets on squares 2 through 9 may be required to be within minimum and maximum limits that may be posted on the casino table. A winning bet on a square is considered as including winning bets on all higher numbered squares. Each square (except square 1) has an upper number representing the payoff on a winning bet on that square, and a lower number representing the cumulative payoff on that square and all

higher numbered squares. The payoff numbers are multiplied by the amount of a winning bet. E.g., if a player has a 4 high hand, and has bet \$1 on square 4 (and thus has also bet \$1 on squares 5 through 9, as bets on these squares are required and bets on each square must be equal), the player wins \$118 on square 4, \$47 on square 5, \$22 on square 6, \$12 on square 7, \$7 on square 8, \$4 on square 9, for a cumulative total of \$210.

[0060] Square 1 has upper indicia stating "50 CENT BET ONLY" and lower indicia stating "\$10,000 PLUS". The payout for a bet on square 1 is always \$10,000 plus 2,750 times the amount bet on any other square by the winning player. (A winning bet on square 1 is considered a winning bet on all squares, and thus is paid the cumulative amount of a bet on all of squares 2 through 9.) In addition, when there is a winner on square 1, all other players who placed non-winning bets on square 1 receive equal shares of a \$5,000 bonus payout. E.g., if one player placed a winning bet on square 1, and five other players placed non-winning bets on square 1, each of the other players would receive \$1,000 of the bonus payout. (The house may substitute different fixed amounts for \$10,000 and \$5,000.) The dealer first deals four cards face down to each player. The

players then place their bets. The dealer turns each hand over, and picks up all losing hands and bets from the table. The dealer places a marker on each winning square, and verifies the amount bet on that square by each winning player. Next the dealer pays off the winning bets on squares 2 through 9 by multiplying the amount of the equal bet placed in each square by the lower number in the square corresponding to the value of the hand. If there is a winner on square 1, the dealer pays the winner \$10,000 plus 2,750 times the equal bet placed by the winner on any other squares, and divides the \$5,000 bonus payout among any other players who placed a bet on square 1. Finally, the dealer picks up the hands and bets of the winning players.

[0061] The second preferred embodiment of the invention is played on electronic gaming device 20, including a display screen 22, as shown in FIG. 2. A processor and memory (not shown in the drawings) may be enclosed within housing 24, or the device may be networked to an external processor and memory. All rules for payouts are the same as for the first embodiment, except for rectangle 1 on which there is a progressive jackpot payout. Rectangles 26 corresponding to the squares for 1 low through 9 low in

the first preferred embodiment are displayed in the upper half of the screen. There is a four-card display area 28 in the middle of the lower half of the screen. The players credits are displayed in the lower left corner 30 and wager amount is shown in the lower right corner 32. A deal button 34 is depressed to start the hand. A wager change button 36 is provided to alter the number of coins wagered, within the limits of a five-coin minimum and a nine-coin maximum. A cash out button 38 is also provided, with a currency insertion slot and validator 40, a coin slot 42, and a coin trough 44. A pay ticket ejection slot 46 is also included, as many casinos have gone to the system of cashing out pay tickets for players winnings. Any use of coins may be eliminated, with pay tickets dispensed to players to cash out at the casinos cashiers window. Paper money may be inserted in the currency insertion slot, and is ejected if it is not validated. The coin slot may be obsolete, but is shown for completeness.

[0062] The number of the players wager displayed in the lower right corner of the screen is initially is "5", and a warning message is displayed in the lower right corner when the players credits are not five times a minimum unit. When the adjust wager button is pressed once, the number of

the players wager displayed is changed to "4", and a warning message is displayed if the players credits are not six times a minimum unit. When the adjust wager button is pressed twice, the number of the players wager displayed is changed to "3", and a warning message is displayed if the players credits are not seven times a minimum unit. When the adjust wager button is pressed thrice, the number of the players wager displayed is changed to "2", and a warning message is displayed if the players credits are not eight times a minimum unit. When the adjust wager button is pressed four times, the number of the players wager displayed is changed to "1", and a warning message is displayed if the players credits are not nine times a minimum unit. The warning message is removed when the players credits have been increased to the required multiple of the minimum unit, by the insertion of currency or coins into said slots. When the deal button is pressed, a warning message is displayed if the players credits are less than the required multiple of the minimum unit, else the representations of the cards are displayed in a fourth area of the display screen. If the player has placed a winning bet and the number of the wager is greater than 1, the machine pays the player the

minimum unit times the lower number on the rectangle having the number of the wager. If the player has placed a winning bet and the number of the wager is 1, the machine pays the player the jackpot. The jackpot is accumulated by retaining a certain percentage (preferably between 90% to 95%) of all the bets placed on square 1 since the last winning bet on square 1 on that machine. (The house takes the remaining 5% to 10% of the bets.)

[0063] FIG. 3 shows expected results for 200 hands of betting one dollar on squares 2 through 9 (this applies to both the first and second preferred embodiments) and of betting fifty cents on square 1 (the results for square 1 only apply to the first preferred embodiment).

[0064] It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the embodiments described above, but encompasses any and all embodiments within the scope of the following claims.